

*Malayana* however is clearly distinct and is very close to *micrura* in size, tail length, coat colour, and tendency to fade. Possibly the two forms are synonymous, but until more material is available from the intermediate areas it is better to regard *malayana* as a subspecies of *micrura* : *Talpa micrura malayana* Chasen.

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SAXMUNDHAM, ENGLAND,  
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THE EARL OF CRANBROOK

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### 3. GESTATION PERIOD OF THE FOURHORNED ANTELOPE *TETRACERUS QUADRICORNIS* (BLAINVILLE)

In March 1958 I reported the gestation period of the Fourhorned Antelope *Tetracerus quadricornis* (Blainville) as 'slightly over eight months, a rather long period for such a small animal' (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 55 : 339).

As the Editors suggested that 'it would be wise to wait for confirmation of the period by further observation' the writer has again checked the gestation period. The female Fourhorned Antelope mated on 24 March 1962 in its small compound at Ahwa, Dangs District, Gujarat State. At no time were the male and female together after mating. It delivered a male fawn on 12 November 1962, a period only twelve days less than eight months. This datum proves that the former period was correct as reported. The first doe had a gestation period of 243 days and the second doe a period of 228 days, a difference of only fifteen days. Such differences are not uncommon among mammals of the same species.

The mother of the present fawn was the antelope which was born

on 13 March 1958 and reported in the *Journal*. Thus it was slightly over four years old before mating. It would appear that these antelopes mature rather slowly and that the gestation period is a long one for an animal measuring between twenty-two and twenty-six inches at the shoulder.

The Indian Muntjac or Barking Deer *Muntiacus muntjak*, an animal twenty inches high at the shoulder or occasionally slightly higher, has a gestation period of about six months. The Swamp Deer *Cervus duvauceli* and the Chital or Axis deer *Cervus axis* also have gestation periods of about six months. It should be kept in mind, however, that the Fourhorned Antelope is not a deer nor is it a true antelope. It belongs to the subfamily Tragelaphinae, a group of animals more African than Indian. India is indeed fortunate to have the only antelope in the world with two pairs of horns.

The female antelope was restless from early morning, and had obvious contractions for three hours prior to delivery. The delivery commenced at 6.30 p.m. with the mother lying on the ground. The head of the fawn with the front hooves pressed tightly against the chin came first. The mother then stood up and the fawn dropped to the ground. She started licking the fawn during its delivery and kept up the process until the fawn was strong enough to stand.

At birth the fawn weighed two pounds and fourteen ounces. It weighed ten ounces more than the fawn which was born on 13 March 1958. Its height at the shoulder of ten inches and its length from nose to tip of tail of fifteen inches are the same measurements as of the first young. The mother antelope is twenty-two inches high at the shoulder; thus young antelopes have nearly half of their mature height at birth.

Just thirty-five minutes after birth the young antelope was standing up on its wobbly legs. In another ten minutes it was walking about in its cage. After another half hour the fawn was nursing.

The male Fourhorned Antelope in an adjoining cage was as pugnacious as ever during the birth of the fawn. He kept butting his horns through the wire netting at the female and seemed to be quite unhappy about the whole affair. The male is a year younger than the female. Male Fourhorned Antelopes make dangerous pets. The writer uses a rake while cleaning, watering, and feeding the male. Even then it is a risky process. Nevertheless, raising Fourhorned Antelopes has been very interesting.

From these two observations the gestation period of *Tetracerus quadricornis* would seem to be approximately  $7\frac{1}{2}$  to 8 months. This fact too makes the Fourhorned Antelope an unusual animal, though

Prater (THE BOOK OF INDIAN ANIMALS, p. 250) indicates a gestation period of 8 months for the Hog Deer [*Axis porcinus* (Zimmermann)].

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#### 4. NOCTURNAL 'PREDATOR' OF YELLOW OLEANDER (*THEVETIA NERIIFOLIA*)

With reference to D. E. Reuben's note in the December number of the *Journal* [58 (3) : 808] on 'Nocturnal "Predator" of Fruit of Yellow Oleander (*Thevetia neriifolia*)' the following information may be interesting to your readers.

In my office compound there are a few plants of Yellow Oleander. A rat used to bring mature fruits of this plant inside the drawer of my table to which, as I later discovered, it had a secret approach. The soft parts of the fruits were found eaten and the stones left absolutely clean. As the poisonous properties of the plant are well known I expected the rat to die and not return to his 'dining drawer'. But no. On at least five subsequent occasions I found stones of oleander fruit inside the drawer eaten in the same manner, their number varying from 2 to 6. Along with these seeds were also found partly eaten seeds of the Persian Lilac (*Melia azedarach*), areca nuts, sugar cane bits, etc. The nocturnal visits continued for about 20 days after I first noticed the fruits inside the drawer. Then the visits came abruptly to an end with the shifting of the table. Though not unlikely, I doubt if the rat died of the toxic effect of the oleander seeds; if it did, it should be concluded that the effect of the poison is fairly slow. Some books on pharmacology give 8 to 10 seeds or 250 grains of root as the lethal dose.

Seeds thus carried away from the site of the parent plant are an effective means of dispersal of seeds. In this particular case I may mention that the oleander plants are situated 30 to 60 feet away from the place where the seeds were found eaten. The ground beneath them was searched for eaten seeds but none was found in the immediate vicinity.

SADIYA FOREST DIVISION,  
TEZU (N.E.F.A.),  
June 25, 1962.

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